

Will Boykin House  
5.1 mi. N of the intersection of  
State Rte. 32 and County Rte. 1  
Memphis  
Pickens County  
Alabama

HABS No. AL-870

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. AL-870

## WILL BOYKIN HOUSE

Location: 5.1 miles north of the intersection of State Route 32 and County Route 1, Memphis, Pickens County, Alabama.

USGS Pickensville 7-1/2' Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates: 16.378150.3666790.

Present Owner: United States of America (August 1978).

Present Use: Vacant.

Significance: The Boykin House is a good example of a double-pen (two-room) house, one of the basic house types of rural Alabama. Prior to 1940, two additions were made at the rear. Dismantled, moved and reconstructed around 1940, it served as the dwelling for the Boykins, a black family who owned and farmed the land from about 1940 to 1975.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The original date of erection is unknown. However, the house plan and architectural details suggest a late nineteenth or early twentieth century date. The original house had a double-pen (two-room) plan. The house is constructed of timber cut with a circular saw, however the sills are hewn. The two original rooms and northeast ell, the first addition to the house, have interior novelty siding, of the type that was common from 1890 to 1920. The size and frame construction of the house, characterize it as a "third generation" folk house, the final stage of evolution of this type. Most third generation folk houses in Alabama date from 1875 to 1920. (Wilson, pp. 25-26)

Around 1940, the house was disassembled, moved, and reconstructed on a new site.

2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Boykin House is situated on a tract of land acquired by the United States of America for the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project and described as follows:

"All that tract or parcel of land lying and being in Fractional Section 22, Township 22 South, Range 17 West, Huntsville Meridian, Pickens County, Alabama, being Lots 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Block 10 of the original plat of the Town of Memphis, Alabama, as recorded in Deed Book "W", page 488 of the records in the Office of the Judge of Probate

of Pickens County, Alabama. Containing 3.30 acres, more or less..."

The East Tennessee Title Company, under contract to the United States Army Corp of Engineers, was unable to establish clear title for the former owner, Will Boykin. Two affidavits of adverse possession were filed for Boykin, recorded in Deed Book 120, located in the Probate Office of Pickens County, Carrollton, Alabama. That affidavit signed by Earnest Coleman, dated October 15, 1975, recorded on page 811, stated that for the forty years Coleman was familiar with the tract of land, Boykin had been in possession of the property. The affidavit signed by William D. King III, dated September 24, 1975, recorded on page 809, stated that for the thirty-three years in which King had been familiar with the tract it had been in Boykin's possession. Both affidavits stated that Will Boykin and his predecessors had exercised these acts of possession over the land:

"They have cultivated the soil and harvested the crops therefrom, have grown and harvested timber thereon, have erected fencing and buildings thereon and maintained same, and have exercised the various other acts of ownership which are customarily performed by an owner over his land during this time".

According to Mrs. Almo Coleman, her father, Will Boykin, purchased the land from a man named Ferguson, prior to moving the house to that site. The house formerly located at a different site in or around Memphis, was bought from a family by the name of Ivy.

In 1975, the United States of America acquired the property from Will Boykin for the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project. (Warranty Deed, October 15, 1975, recorded in Deed Book 120, p. 806, Probate Office of Pickens County, Carrollton, Alabama).

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The original builder and contractor are unknown. Mrs. Almo Coleman stated that around 1940 the house was disassembled, moved to a new site by mule-drawn wagons, and reconstructed by her husband Tommy Lee Coleman, who was a carpenter, and her father, Will Boykin.
5. Original construction: The original double-pen house (before it was enlarged) consisted of two adjacent rooms of almost equal size --the western rooms of the present house: (north room 17'5" x 14'3", south room 17'2" x 14'2" --with two front doors and windows and outside end chimneys on each gable end. No structural evidence could be seen to indicate that either of the western rooms were built before the other.

6. Alterations and additions: Inspection of the structure underneath the house, indicates that the two eastern (rear) rooms were built, later than the two western (front) rooms and that the northeast room is older than the southeast room. Joists dimension of different, were used --2 x 6s for the rear as opposed to 2 x 8s for the front, and a separate set of piers was built to support the eastern rooms. The two eastern rooms are built against the original exterior vertical boarding of the western rooms.

The northeastern room, like the two west rooms, had interior novelty siding, common from 1890 to 1920, suggesting that sometime during this period these three rooms constituted the house. The floor joists of the northeast and southeast rooms overlap but are not joined, further indicating that these two eastern rooms are not of the same date. The southeast room is built against the exterior siding of the northeast and the southwest rooms, suggesting that this was the last room to be added. The floor boards of the southeast room are cut evenly 5 feet from the current east (rear) wall of this room, and there is a sill running north-south at this point, indicating that this room was widened at some point. The rafters of the shed roof over this room extend the full width of this room however.

An appraisal report made from an inspection of the house on January 13, 1975 mentions a 7' by 8' back porch. The only evidence of this porch is a 9' board with four smaller support blocks attached, which appear to have carried rafters for a porch roof over the door on the east end of the south elevation.

The house as it stood around 1940, before it was moved to the present site had, according to Mrs. Almo Coleman, four rooms. Mrs. Coleman stated that the house was rebuilt, according to the same plan, when moved, and that no major alterations have been made since. The enlargement of the southeast rear room and the construction of the small southeast porch (now gone) may have been done, though, after the house was moved.

B. Historican Events and Persons Associated with the Structure:

The Boykin house was the home of Will Boykin and his family for approximately forty years. The family, including Will Boykin's daughter, Almo Coleman, farmed their small 3-acre plot of land, growing about one acre of cotton. They also had a vegetable garden, poultry, and a few dairy cows. The family moved to Memphis from nearby in Mississippi. Will Boykin died in June of 1978.

The owners of the house prior to its relocation were, according to Mrs. Almo Coleman, a white family named Ivy. The Ivy families in Memphis, Alabama, according to information provided by Mr. John Lee, were relations of Bird Ivy, a plantation owner or his slaves (who also took the name of Ivory). Bird Ivy had been one of the wealthiest and most notable planters in the area. (See Memphis, Alabama, HABS No. AL-869, Supplemental Material, Section D. 7.)

The house is now located near one of the main roads in Memphis, Alabama. The town of Memphis, a thriving river town in the mid-19th century, became a rural Black community in the early 20th century. (See HABS No. AL-869)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Records, Probate Office, Pickens County Courthouse, Carrollton, Alabama.

Interviews:

Mrs. Almo Coleman, Memphis, Alabama, June 30, 1978. Former occupant of dwelling and daughter of Will Boykin, provided information about the relocation of the house, and their life after that time.

John Lee, Dancy, Alabama, June 30, 1978. Local historian who owned property near Memphis, provided information about the town and the Ivy family.

2. Secondary sources:

Wilson, Eugene, Alabama Folk Houses (Montgomery, Alabama: Alabama Historical Commission, 1975).

Wyatt, R. R., Autobiography of a Little Man (Macon, Mississippi: Macon Beacon Office, 1939). Autobiography of Dr. R. R. "Rufe" Wyatt, who lived in Memphis, Alabama during the late 19th century. Available in Special Collections, Mississippi State University Library, Starkville, Mississippi, and at Ada Session Fant Library, Macon, Mississippi.

Prepared by: Michael Ann Williams  
Assistant Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
August 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This building is an example of a double-pen (two-room) house, a basic house type in rural Alabama. Additions were made to the rear prior to its having been dismantled and moved to the current site.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor, not maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This one-story house is 39'-6" (four-bay front) by 39'-0". It has a rectangular plan with two front rooms, two back rooms, and an attached front porch. Chimney height above grade is 19'-6".
2. Foundations: There is a variety of foundation materials used including stone and cast concrete piers. The house is raised above grade on these supports and is unenclosed below floor level.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The exterior walls consist of vertical wood siding nailed to wood studs. Exterior walls have been surfaced with asphalt-paper siding, most of which has been removed.
4. Structural system, framing: The structural system, is entirely of wood for the floor, wall, and roof framing.
5. Porches: The front porch (32'-3" in width by 5'-0" in depth) is attached to the west facade, and is sheltered by a gently sloping metal roof.
6. Chimneys: There are two exterior end chimneys--one on the north gable end, one on the south. Both are built in stretcher bond with irregular horizontal coursing. There is a metal stove flue in the southeast rear room.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: There are two main entrances on the west elevation, one into each of the two front rooms. One rear entrance is located on the south wall of the southeast room. A second rear entrance is located on the north wall of the northeast room. All doors are missing.

- b. Windows and shutters: Windows are located on all four facades, two on the west facade and one on each of the other three facades. The windows are four-over-four, double hung windows with no counterweight mechanisms.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The major gable roof runs north-south and is intersected on its northern rear flank by a lower gable roof over the northeast room. On its southern rear flank a shed roof is attached sloping downward to the east. A shed roof over the entire front porch. Roof covering is predominantly standing seam galvanized metal sheeting. Roof covering on the porch shed roof is corrugated galvanized metal sheeting. Roof surfaces are unpainted.
- b. Cornice, eaves: No cornices exist on this building, only plain fascia boards.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plan: This building has only one story composed of four rooms with no connecting halls or corridors. Each of the two front rooms has its own entrance from the front porch. These rooms are connected to each other by a cased opening and to the rooms behind them by doors. The two rear rooms are connected to each other by a cased opening and to the outside by single doors on the north and south facades. Chimneys are located in the front rooms, one on the north end wall and the other on the south. A 5'-deep front porch extends approximately 32'3" along the west facade.
- 2. Flooring: Flooring in this building is wood. Hearths are of cement and have been edged with metal.
- 3. Wall and ceiling finish: Interior walls across much of the rear portion of the house have been surfaced with horizontal tongue-and-groove wood boarding covered with wallpaper and subsequently painted. Other interior wall surfaces are of vertical boarding covered with wallpaper and subsequently painted or in some cases resurfaces with painted gypsum board. In the front rooms and in the northeast room, ceilings are tongue-and-groove boards covered with wallpaper and subsequently painted. The ceiling joists and rafters have been left exposed in the southeast room.
- 4. Decorative features and trim: There is no special trim except for two pilastered mantels (one composed of molded boards) in the two front rooms.

5. Mechanical equipment: No mechanical equipment exists in this building. There are electric outlets, gas hookups and telephone connections, but there is no running water.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house facade faces a broad abandoned field to the west.
2. Outbuildings: A shed measuring approximately 3'4" by 16'-0" is located roughly 100 feet northeast of the house. An outhouse measuring approximately 4'-0" by 6'-0" is located roughly 75 feet east of the house.

Prepared by : James Murray Howard  
Project Supervisor  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
August 1978



PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation done during the 1978 Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Project, undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Inter-agency Archeological Services, Atlanta, and cosponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile and Nashville Districts, in compliance with Executive Order 11593, as a mitigative effort in the construction of the waterway. Records were made of eighteen historic sites and structures in the region between Gainesville, Alabama, and Iuka, Mississippi.

The project was executed under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was James Murray Howard of the University of Illinois. Project Historian was Betty K. Bird of the University of Virginia. The Assistant Historian was Michael Ann Williams (University of Pennsylvania). Foreman was Ruthie D. Wiley of the University of Florida. Student Architects who prepared measured drawings for the project were Carol J. Crandall (Carnegie-Mellon University), Richard J. Cronenberger (University of Miami), Peter G. Darlow (McGill University), Daniel M. Gaines (University of Tennessee), and R. Bradley Mellor (Rice University). The inventory of sites within the project area was carried out by Inventory Supervisor J. A. Chewning of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Assistant Historian for the inventory was Pamela J. Wolf (George Washington University). One structure was recorded during the winter of 1979 by project supervisor Peter G. Darlow (McGill University), Sally K. Tompkins, Project Historian, and Staff Architects Bethanie C. Grashof, Rudy Massengill, and Janet Hochuli, James F. Speake and Reginald A. Berry (Howard University). Photographs were taken by David J. Kaminsky in the summer of 1978 and by Gil Ford in the spring of 1979.